SOME NEW BOOKS.

Shakespeare and Voltaire.

We imagine that few lovers of Shakespeare have failed to read the book entitled "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist," which constituted the first volume in the "Shakespearean Wars" series projected by Dr. T. R. LOUNSBURY, professor of English in Yale University. As the author explained in the preface to that book, he means by "Shakespearean Wars," the controversies which have arisen concerning, first, Shakespeare's methods, and, secondly, Shakespeare's texts. The purpose of the first volume was to show that the controversy between what we call the classical and romantic dramas was carried on as vigorously during the Elizabethan era as it has been at any period since, although the names, classical and romantic, were not at that time employed. Prof. Lounsbury also undertook to prove that Shakespeare not only recognized the distinction between the two kinds of drama, but that he advisedly ranged himself upon the side of the Romanticists. That his rejection of the unities was not accidental but deliberate is inferred from the facts that in at least one instance, "The Tempest," he conformed to them, while in two or three other instances, he indicated his dissent from them by the references he made to the arguments by which they were supported. Prof. Lounsbury proceeded to point out that, up to the period of the Civil War in England, the form of the drama which is best exemplified by the plays of Shakespeare prevailed there generally over the form which had been exemplified in Ben Jonson's pieces, but that this condition of things was reversed after the Restoration.

Classicism then took possession of the English stage, and retained it until it was overthrown by the reviving popularity of Shakespeare. It was, however, a long battle which was waged between classicism and romanticism on the English stage during the eighteenth century. The victory which was there gained by the champions of Shakespeare's methods was gained very slowly. What the chief source of obstruction was is explained at length in the second volume of the "Shakespearian Wars" series, just published by the Scribners under the title, *Shakespeare and Voltaire.* In the preface to his new book Prof. Lounsbury directs the reader's attention to the fact that "there was one man in particular who did more than any other, or rather more than all of them, to delay in every country of Europe the revolt against classicism, and in some to arrest it for more than a generation. This man was Voltaire. It is the story of the relations he held to Shakespeare, of the influence originally exerted upon him by the English dramatist, of the war he waged against the latter's growing reputation on the Continent, of the hostility evoked in turn toward himself in England, which I have sought to relate in the following pages." The author goes on to say that the story has never been previously told save in part. Certain portions of it, indeed, have been made the subject of treatises in French and German, but in none of these has there been any attempt to portray Voltaire's attitude throughout with the desirable fulness, or to offer any but meagre references to the responsive attitude assumed toward Voltaire by the English.

In the first chapter, headed "Voltaire in England," we are reminded that Voltaire crossed the Channel in May, 1726, and remained on the British side of it nearly three years. He learned to "read English with ease, to speak it with a tolerable degree of fluency, and to write it with what his enemies chose to consider suspicious accuracy." He also became an ardent "admirer of English philosophy and science, as embodied in the works of Locke and Newton," and he formed a limited acquaintance with English literature. Of the works of Shakespeare he mentions eight tragedies and four historical plays, but Prof. Lounsbury can find in Voltaire's writings no indication of knowledge that Shakespeare ever wrote a comedy. The pieces with which he was most familiar were "Hamlet" and "Julius Cæsar." If he reprobated Shakespeare's violation of the classical unities and the mixture of the comic and the tragic in the same production—the two distinctive features of what we call the romantic drama—Voltaire was influenced not only by the fact that he was a Frenchman trained in the rules propounded by Boileau and exemplified in practice by Racine, but also by the fact that in the third decade of the eighteenth century, and for some time previously, cultivated Englishmen maintained an apologetic attitude with regard to Shakespeare. By Bolingbroke, for instance, the French visitor was informed that the English stage did not possess a single good tragedy. Prof. Lounsbury recalls the fact that earlier in the century Shaftesbury had condescendingly acknowledged that Shakespeare deserved a good deal of praise for his skill in characterization, which caused him to be relished in spite of "his natural rudeness, his unpolished style, his antiquated phrase and wit, his want of method and coherence, and his deficiency in almost all the graces and ornaments of this kind of writing." Dryden, also, though more just to the great dramatist, had spoken of his "bombast" and of his "comic wit degenerating into clenches," and had recorded the fact that in his (Dryden's) time Fletcher's pieces were acted much oftener than Shakespeare's. It is further mentioned by Prof. Lounsbury that in the list of English authors which Chesterfield compiled for his son, which he said included those which a gentleman ought to know, Shakespeare did not appear; and, when he included Shakespeare in the works of four writers sent to a French lady, he deemed it needful to explain that he neither condoned the playwright's irregularities nor failed to recognize his errors.

Under the circumstances, it should hardly be expected that Voltaire would profess indiscriminate admiration of Shakespeare. But, as Prof. Lounsbury reminds us, Voltaire was not only a Frenchman, but also a man of genius. "As a man of genius he could not help being impressed by certain qualities which the English dramatist exhibited. They affected him, they influenced him, to an extent of which he was hardly conscious, and which at a later period he was little disposed to acknowledge." In a letter to Bolingbroke he said that "however deficient in taste," Shakespeare's plays "unmistakably possessed power. They held the attention, they stirred the heart." Prof. Lounsbury adds that even "long afterward, when his [Voltaire's] criticism of Shakespeare had begun to assume a peculiarly depreciatory tone, he did not refuse to acknowledge the strength that lay in these dramas, bizarre and savage as he both deemed and termed them." Thus in 1764 he wrote: "I have seen 'Julius Cæsar' played, and confess that from the first scene, when I heard the tribunes reproaching the Roman populace for its ingratitude to Pompey, and its attachment to Pompey's conqueror, I began to be interested, to be excited. I did not see afterward any conspirators upon the stage who did not arouse my curiosity; and, in spite of the large number of its absurd improprieties, I felt that the piece impressed me."

In his third chapter Prof. Lounsbury concedes that there was ample foundation for Voltaire's boast that it was he who had first made Shakespeare known to France. Voltaire might have gone further and said that it was he who introduced Shakespeare to the knowledge of the Continent. To bring about such a result circumstances came to the aid of his abilities. The universal acceptance which during the reign of Louis XIV. the French language had won among all the cultivated classes of the Continent it continued to retain up to the outbreak of the French Revolution. Thus it came to pass that during all the latter half of his long life Voltaire had for his audience the whole of Continental Europe, and even in England his influence was great, though it was less there than elsewhere. But, if even with the English his words carried weight, to the rest of Europe they carried conviction. "Even those who bitterly resented the views he expressed on matters of religion deferred largely to his judgment on matters of literature. Friend and foe alike recognized the prevalence and potency of this influence. 'What does it avail,' said Lessing with some bitterness, 'to raise objections against M. de Voltaire? He speaks, and the world believes.'"

Prof. Lounsbury, however, is careful to make a distinction often overlooked. He points out, that, while Voltaire introduced Shakespeare to the European mainland, he did not make it acquainted with him. They learned from him of the existence of Shakespeare, and they were informed that his plays, though "monstrosities taken as wholes, contained some most admirable passages." Voltaire did not enable Continental readers to judge for themselves of the merits of the English dramatist. "The specimens of his work which Voltaire communicated, at first with praise, were very meagre. Even then, they gave in nearly every instance an inadequate, and sometimes a preverted, idea of the original. His later and fuller versions were little more than travesties. It is a question, indeed, whether the appreciation of Shakespeare which was sure to come to the Continent sooner or later, was not retarded rather than advanced by the knowledge Voltaire imparted, coupled with the views he expressed. He was responsible for the critical estimates of the dramatist which continued to prevail in Europe during a good share of the eighteenth century."

It was especially in the "Philosophical Letters"—a work which quickly traversed the whole length and breadth of Europe—that Voltaire wakened the curiosity of the Continent about Shakespeare. These letters were first published—of course in a translation—in London in 1733; it was not until the following year that the originals appeared in France. Two of the letters treated of the English drama. In the letter devoted to English comedy, not even the name of Shakespeare is mentioned, but the views expressed about that dramatist in the letter on tragedy dominated the European mainland for half a century. Indeed, our author would say that Voltaire's views remained preponderant in Germany until Shakespeare, as translated by Schlegel and Tieck, took the field in person. It was in this letter that Voltaire first gave vent to the extravagant admiration for Addison's "Cato," which was to find constant expression during the rest of his life. Here, in his opinion, was a play written in perfect taste. If it had not in every respect reached the highest ideal, it had furnished the model for all succeeding writers. What the merits were which entitled it to this lofty position it is easy to discover from the views about the drama to which Voltaire never ceased to cling with almost passionate fervor. Addison's "Cato" "conformed in every particular to the rules. It observed the unities. It had no comic scenes intermixed with its tragic. No one appeared in it below the rank of a patrician or of a foreign monarch. It shed no blood before the eyes of the spectator. *Cato*, though exhibited to the audience in his dying moments, in order to make a few closing remarks, had been considerate enough to fall on his sword behind the scenes. Everybody throughout had conducted himself with the most conspicuous propriety. There was, to be sure, an insipid love story, against the constant introduction of which into tragedy Voltaire steadily protested in print, though he usually gave way to it in practice. Certain other deficiencies there were. But, while the existence of these prevented the play from being considered perfect, it did not prevent it from being a beautiful, as well as a rational piece. Yet, although Voltaire pronounced *Cato* himself the greatest character that had ever been brought upon the stage, he "knew perfectly well the wide gulf that lies between taste and genius" and "no more than Addison's countrymen did he venture to set Addison's tragedy beside the plays of Shakespeare as an exhibition of *power*." He first asserted that the English spoke of Shakespeare as the Corneille of their nation, though, as Prof. Lounsbury points out, the comparison would never occur to Englishmen. Later, with more fidelity to fact, Voltaire recorded that Shakespeare's countrymen considered him another Sophocles. He goes on to say that he himself took no such extravagant view of the English dramatist's greatness. Shakespeare's genius, he said, "was at once strong and abundant, natural and sublime, but without the smallest part of taste, and devoid of the remotest idea of the rules." Thus, says our author, "he set the tune which was played with slight variations by countless critics on the Continent, and somewhat in England itself, all through the eighteenth century." Voltaire further observed that "these plays of Shakespeare which are christened tragedies are, in reality, nothing but monstrous farces. Yet they contain scenes so beautiful and passages so full of the grand and the terrible that they have always been played with prodigious success. Later writers have, accordingly, been tempted to imitate him, but they have succeeded only in reproducing his absurdities without ever exhibiting his power. The natural consequence has followed. The merit of Shakespeare has been the ruin of the English stage."

Voltaire informed the world, by which he meant the Continent, that it had heard only of Shakespeare's faults, and he announced an intention of making known to it the beauties of the English dramatist. To that end he translated into French *Hamlet's* soliloquy. Prof. Lounsbury has retranslated Voltaire's version into English with, he tells us, tolerable literalness, so as to enable us to get from it the sort of impression which Frenchmen would receive of the thoughts and feelings which Shakespeare was seeking to convey. We reproduce our author's version of Voltaire's translation of the soliloquy:

Pause, it is incumbent to choose and pass in an instant
From life to death, or from existence to nothingness.
Cruel gods, if there be any gods, enlighten my heart.
Must I grow old, bowed under the hand that insults me,
Endure, or end my ill fortune and my fate?
Who am I? What holds me back? And what is death?
It is the end of our ills, it is my sole refuge;
After long delirium it is a tranquil slumber.
One falls asleep and all dies; but a frightful awakening
May perhaps succeed to the pleasures of sleep.
We are threatened, we are told that this short life
Is by eternal torments immediately followed.
O death! fatal moment! dreadful eternity!
Every heart, at thy name merely, is congealed with terror.
Ah! were it not for thee who could endure this life?
Who would bless the hypocrisy of our lying priests?
Flatter the faults of an unworthy mistress?
Grovel under a minister of state, pay court to his pride?
And show the weakness of his downcast soul
To ingrate friends, who turn away their eyes?
Death would be too sweet in extremities like these.
But doubt speaks and cries out to us, Stop!
It forbids our hands indulging in that happy homicide,
And of a warlike hero makes a timid Christian.

Prof. Lounsbury, of course, does not pretend that his retranslation represents the poetic merit of Voltaire's version. All that he claims for it is that it gives a correct conception of the French poet's fidelity to the original. This being admitted, "What idea," he asks, "could Voltaire's countrymen have got from it of what *Hamlet* said? Its composition reminds one of the proportion which sack bore to bread in *Falstaff's* tavern account. There is but a half-penny worth of Shakespeare to an intolerable deal of Voltaire."

What were Voltaire's obligations, recognized or unrecognized, to Shakespeare? In Prof. Lounsbury's opinion there is no doubt that Voltaire's acquaintance with the English stage, and especially with Shakespeare, broadened, at least for a time, his conception of the privileges of the dramatist. "It led him at first to question the justice of the rules prescribed and the methods followed in his own country. It forced upon his attention the limitations of the French drama. They were not limitations existing in nature; they were frequently not imposed by the authority of the ancients. They were, in fact, nothing but conventions which time and custom had made sacred. Why was it always necessary to go back for characters to the everlasting Greeks and Romans? Why should not subjects be taken from modern history, and, if from modern history, why should not modern names be used? These things had been done, it is true, though Voltaire did not say it; but they had been few, they had been far between, they had made but little impression. He felt further the tyranny of the restrictions which these conventions imposed not only upon the subject of the play, but also upon its conduct. It occurred to him that it might work no harm if there was a little less talk and a little more action. • • • These and similar questions presented themselves to his ever-active mind, as he studied with attention the English stage."

So much for the general effect produced upon Voltaire by his acquaintance with the English theatre. Had he any specific obligations to English dramatists? This question is answered in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of the book before us, in which the author examines five of Voltaire's plays, to wit, "Brutus," "Zaïre," "The Death of Cæsar," "Mahomet," and "Semiramis." The tragedy of "Brutus" was the earliest one which Voltaire brought out after his return from exile. It was first acted in December, 1730, and a translation of it was produced in London in November, 1734. In the letter to Bolingbroke which is prefixed to the play, Voltaire reminded his friend that they had both been equally surprised that no Englishman had selected as a subject the first Roman Consul condemning to death his son for having been concerned in a conspiracy to restore the Tarquins. The truth, of course, is that a tragedy on this very subject had been written by Nathaniel Lee, and had been produced in 1681. When the English translation of "Brutus" was acted in England the fact was pointed out. Indeed, a reviewer asserted that Voltaire had not only taken the subject from Lee's "Brutus," but had imitated Lee's finest scenes. Prof. Lounsbury concedes that to have borrowed from Lee under the circumstances would have implied peculiar baseness upon the part of Voltaire. He would appear in the light of having first stolen his work from an author far inferior, and then of not only making no acknowledgment of the obligation, but of denying even the existence of the original. Whatever may be said of Voltaire's subsequent conduct toward Shakespeare, our author holds that in the case of "Brutus" there is little ground for the charge of plagiarism. "The weight of evidence is all in favor of his total ignorance of Lee's work at the time he made the assertion which is found in his discourse upon tragedy. The plots of the two plays are in most respects as far apart as they well can be in two pieces based upon the same subject. Certain resemblances there are; but, besides being superficial, they have almost the nature of the inevitable. In both dramas the cause of the ruin of Titus is a fatal passion which seduces him from allegiance to his country. In Lee's play he is in love with Teraminta, a natural daughter of the exiled King. In Voltaire's, it is with his legitimate daughter, Tullia, who has been detained in the house of Brutus. But a story of this sort was then a necessity of the situation. No drama could be expected to have much hope of success on the English stage without love as a leading motive. On the French, it could have none at all. If once that passion were introduced into the play, love for a daughter of Tarquin would naturally be selected to account for the defection of the son of Brutus from the patriot cause. The further resemblances are incidental, and of slight importance; the differences, both in details and in the general conduct of the plot, are extreme." In a word, our author is convinced that, so far as Brutus is concerned, Voltaire cannot be fairly charged with unacknowledged obligations to an English author. In the case of "Zaïre" on the other hand, which was produced in August, 1732, Prof. Lounsbury thinks that the influence of Shakespeare is indisputable. The imitation of "Othello" is pronounced, distinctly perceptible, in spite of the particular variations which taste or necessity compel.

The likeness is recognizable both in the general outline of the plot and in the details. "A close comparison makes this point very plain. In both these plays the action turns upon a disproportioned match. In both there is the same all-absorbing love on the part of the hero and of heroine. In both there is the same unfounded jealousy on the part of the hero. For furnishing it a pretext for its display, in place of the handkerchief in 'Othello' is substituted in 'Zaïre' an intercepted letter, whose purport is mistaken. In both the hero has a confidant to whom he reveals his inmost heart. He it is who sympathizes, or pretends to sympathize, with his superior, and assists him in carrying his wishes into effect. In the French play he is represented as being influenced by much higher motives than in the English; but as a dramatic character he is immeasurably inferior to the intellectual villain whom Shakespeare depicted. In both the hero murders the woman he loves, though in 'Zaïre' he does it decorously behind the scenes. The audience do not witness the act; they hear only the words attending its commission. In both the hero is made to wake suddenly to the consciousness of his crime, of the causelessness of his jealousy, of the irreparable wrong he has inflicted upon the woman who loves him passionately. In both he kills himself by way of atonement."

Now in the dedicatory epistle prefixed to "Zaïre" there was not a word about Shakespeare; not an intimation that such a play as "Othello" had ever been present to Voltaire's thoughts when he wrote "Zaïre." Nor in a later edition, containing a second epistle to Voltaire's friend Falkener, who had become the English Ambassador at Constantinople, was there the remotest allusion to the man from whom the author of "Zaïre" had derived much which had given direction, if not distinction, to his play. Prof. Lounsbury deems it impossible to acquit Voltaire of disingenuousness in this omission. It is, indeed, conceded that "he had done no more than what he had a right to do in borrowing from Shakespeare the incidents he did. Speaking for myself, at least, it does not seem to me that he exceeded the just privilege of an author who finds something admirable to imitate in the works of another author writing in a strange tongue. It is of the slightest possible consequence from what quarter a great writer gets his materials; what he does with it after he has gotten it is the all-important consideration." It is not, therefore, the act of borrowing from "Othello" which is reprobated in the author of "Zaïre." "It is his attempted concealment of the act which exposes him to censure, and as much so for its irrationality as for its stupidity. For in this case, while many of the incidents were suggested by Shakespeare, the treatment he gave them was entirely his own. The play was a thoroughly French play, and in the French taste. All the more inexcusable, therefore, was the sedulous care manifested to refrain from making the slightest allusion to the source from which so much had been taken. The obligations he was under were not indeed likely to be recognized by his countrymen in the almost universal ignorance of Shakespeare which then prevailed. But an author of the standing and genius of Voltaire is expected to act from a sense of right, and not from a fear of detection." It is pointed out, however, by Prof. Lounsbury that, if the French did not observe Voltaire's indebtedness to Shakespeare in this piece, it did not escape the attention of the English. The indebtedness was first made subject of public remark when an adaptation of "Zaïre" was brought out on the London stage. Indeed, the fact was stated almost bluntly by Colley Cibber in the prologue written by him for the English version, and recited by his son. It is significant that with Englishmen Voltaire's unavowed imitation of "Othello" was at the outset a matter of patriotic congratulation rather than a censure.

While Voltaire had studiously ignored his obligation to Shakespeare in the case of "Zaïre," he was eager to admit it in "La Mort de César," a piece which consisted of but three acts, and ended with Cæsar's death, or rather with the speeches delivered by Cassius and Antony after Cæsar's dead body had been brought into the forum. Voltaire had to substitute Cassius for Brutus in this scene because he makes Brutus Cæsar's son, and could not well introduce a parricide as delivering a speech in which he justified his murder of his father on the ground of love of country. In an advertisement to the reader prefixed to the pretended word-for-word version of the three acts of Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" which Voltaire published in 1764—an advertisement for which Voltaire was, of course, responsible—the reader is told that he will now be able to make for himself a comparison between the works of Shakespeare and Voltaire which dealt with the death of Cæsar, and can thus decide whether the tragic art has made any progress since the days of Elizabeth. Prof. Lounsbury points out that this French version of the English play, although fidelity was claimed for it, was really an exhibition on Voltaire's part of practices which in an inferior man would be called fraud. The so-called literal translation of Shakespeare's play stops designedly with the death of the dictator, the passages of the original in which Brutus and Antony addressed the populace being carefully omitted. Our author holds that Voltaire was wise in withholding from his readers any version of the scenes immediately following the death of Cæsar. "He had good reason to shun the comparison, even if Shakespeare's words were given in a translation as bald and inadequate as that which he made of the rest of the three acts. In this instance it does not require national prepossession or the partisanship of race to recognize the hopeless inferiority of his imitation to the original. The attempt in particular to reproduce the speech of Antony might well have deterred a bolder spirit than his own." Prof. Lounsbury goes on to say that Voltaire's adaptation of Antony's speech in "La Mort de César"—an adaptation which he at first called a translation—showed how little understanding he possessed of the arts by which popular assemblies are swayed. "These the all-comprehending mind of Shakespeare had either conceived of itself or had developed with peculiar effectiveness out of the scattered hints furnished by Appian. The baldest translation of this speech, compared with Voltaire's imitation of it [in 'La Mort de César'] would reveal the difference—not æsthetic but intellectual—in the skill with which the orator in each case is represented as playing upon the passions of the people. • • • Not only was it impossible for Voltaire to approach the spirit and fire of the original, but even more did he fail to convey the remote apprehension of the subtle insinuation which suggests what it does not say, the appeals which inflame the passions they pretend to calm, the thousand delicate touches defying analysis which make the speech of Antony the most effective of oratorical masterpieces."

We have seen that, in the case of "La Mort de César," Voltaire was willing—at the outset at least—to acknowledge his indebtedness to Shakespeare. It is the only time in Voltaire's career in which he voluntarily admitted any specific obligation on his part to the English dramatist. One other admission, indeed, was wrung from him; but it was made in such a way that he who was unacquainted with the original was little likely to suppose that what he saw was borrowed. Outside of these two instances Prof. Lounsbury has not been able to find a line in Voltaire's writings which indicates that a single dramatic situation in his plays had been even remotely suggested by anything he had met with in the works of the author by whom he was alternately attracted and repelled. The course of concealment which he had practised in the case of "Zaïre" he persistently followed. Our author insists, however, that no dramatist ever owed to another a more distinctive obligation than Voltaire owed to Shakespeare in the play of "Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophète," which was brought out in 1742. The direct imitation of Shakespeare which occurs in this piece is described as follows: "It consists of the circumstances attending the death of one of the characters, Zopire, the venerable Sheik of Mecca. Seide, under the influence of fanaticism, murders the aged ruler for whom he feels an instinctive veneration. After the deed has been committed he is horrified to learn that it is his own father to whom he has given the death stroke. Joined with him is the heroine, Palmire, half dissuading her lover from the perpetration of the crime for which her hand is to be his reward, half consenting to the act which is to fulfil the great desire of her life. No one familiar with English literature, who reads the conversations preceding and following the assassination, can fail to be struck by the evident attempt to reproduce the effect of the tremendous situations in *Macbeth* which precede and follow the assassination of *Duncan*. All the accessories to the scene which are found in the one play are introduced into the other, so far as the difference of plot allows them to be employed." Strange to say, it never struck Voltaire as worth while to do so much as refer to the source from which the corresponding scenes in "Mahomet" were taken. The English, on their part, recognized the imitation, and announced it at once. Of the charges of plagiarism brought by them against Voltaire, it is the one most frequently specified. Our author points out, however, that, although it has been so constantly made the subject of animadversion on the part of Englishmen, the obligation was apparently never recognized at the time by Voltaire's countrymen, nor, in truth, do they seem any too well acquainted with it now.

We pass to the last of Voltaire's direct and specific obligations to Shakespeare. Fired by the example of "Hamlet," the French dramatist in the tragedy of "Eriphyle," brought out in 1732, had ventured upon the expedient of introducing a ghost. In that play the shade of *Amphiaraus* appears, forbids the approaching nuptials of his wife and his son *Alcmæon*, and orders the latter to avenge his death at the hands of his mother. The time was not then ripe, however, for a scene of such a character to succeed in France, and the piece was quickly withdrawn. Voltaire's second attempt to introduce a ghost upon the stage was made in his tragedy of "Semiramis," which was acted in 1748, and was built upon essentially the same lines as "Eriphyle." In some verses written to be delivered before the representation of the last-named piece, Voltaire had tried to convey the impression that he had borrowed the idea of introducing a ghost from the "Persæ" of Æschylus. Of Shakespeare he had said nothing. When "Semiramis," came out, however, this manner of proceeding was no longer possible. "A French translation in part of 'Hamlet' had appeared but a short time before. In it the interview between the hero of the piece and the ghost of his father had been rendered in full. No longer, therefore, could the appeal be made to Greek tragedy alone." Accordingly, therefore, in the prefatory discourse to the play of "Semiramis," as printed, the authority of Shakespeare was adduced for the introduction of the ghost. It seems, however, that even here Voltaire was careful not to make his obligation to Shakespeare prominent. "It was not the authority of the English dramatist which he put forward as the main defence for the course he had himself adopted. That authority was, in fact, merely incidental. He based his defence upon the ground that, in representing the manners of the past, he had also a right to represent its beliefs. Antiquity accepted the possibility of apparitions. In a scene which is laid in antiquity, ghosts, accordingly, can be introduced with propriety. Furthermore, he took occasion in this same preface to speak depreciatingly of the author whose action had suggested to him the particular novelty which he had introduced upon the French stage. He gave an account of the plot of 'Hamlet,' which it dignifies too much to call a travesty. The contemporary English assailants of Voltaire used to insist that any obligation he was under to Shakespeare was invariably repaid on the spot by systematic misrepresentation and detraction. His thefts, they said, could always be detected by the cloud of calumnies with which he sought to cover them."

For the account of La Place's and Le Tourneur's translations of Shakespeare, for a review of the Voltaire-Walpole correspondence and for a survey of other phases of the controversy touching Shakespeare's methods we must refer the reader to Prof. Lounsbury's book. Even in a brief and inadequate notice of a remarkable work, however, some reference should be made to the general conclusions set forth in the final chapter. Our author sees in Voltaire a striking example of the inconsistency of human nature. The great apostle of tolerance in matters of religion and government was one of the most intolerant of men in matters of literature. As men persecuted others in the name of religion, so he would have persecuted them in the name of taste. He made use of precisely the same sort of argument for protecting the integrity of taste which excited his derision when applied to the defence of religion. He was convinced that the refined and excellent art possessed by France must be guarded by the severest measures from debasement and profanation. No alien influences must be suffered to contaminate its purity or threaten its permanence. It was the growth of heretical views about the stage which embittered him against Shakespeare, to whom he attributed their increasing prevalence. It was the dislike and dread which he ultimately came to feel for the great Elizabethan which led him to resort to discreditable devices to lower the estimate in which that dramatist was held.

Prof. Lounsbury tells us that, from one point of view, he has found it a depressing task to trace the windings of the tortuous course pursued by Voltaire in regard to Shakespeare. It is no pleasant office to expose the foibles and faults of a great man. It is pointed out that in the case of the great French writer there are special reasons for reluctance. "When everything has been said against Voltaire that can be justly said, there remains to his credit an incalculable sum of services rendered to the progress of the race. He must be taken with his limitations. With all his inconsistencies, his perversities, his mendacities, his ignoble personal quarrels, he was a man of generosity as well as of genius. Much more than this can be said. We can never forget how courageous and how mighty a soldier he was in the war for humanity. To vast multitudes in every station of life he brought the gospel of liberty of thought and of speech, the spirit of sympathy with the unfortunate and the oppressed. But, as to the men of his own time he was an inspiration, so also he was a fear. Before his matchless ridicule, imbecility, narrowness and intolerance cowered affrighted. At the sound of that trumpet call, which demanded that justice should no longer be mute as well as blind, the persecutions of bigotry were stayed, the decisions of iniquitous tribunals were reversed, the indifference and inaction of men in high places were converted into at least a pretended zeal for righteousness and the right. His services in these ways more than offset his questionable practices in other fields. That he failed at times to render the justice he demanded is little more than an illustration of the infirmities of our common nature. Much can be forgiven to one who did so much for his fellow men."

The book before us brings to a close that part of the "Shakespearean Wars" series which deals with the disputes about Shakespeare's dramatic methods. In the next volume the author will review the controversies concerning Shakespeare's texts.

M. W. H.

Italian Life.

The latest addition to "Our European Neighbors" series, which is published by the Putnams, is a volume of some three hundred pages, entitled *Italian Life in Town and Country*, by LUIGI VILLARI. The author, a son of Prof. Villari, takes the point of view required by the editor of this series, that is to say, he looks on Italy with the eyes of an Englishman, while, at the same time, he is helped by his Italian affiliations to make a sympathetic study of the subject. The subject is difficult because of its complexity. The population of the Italian peninsula is far from being homogeneous. A far greater difference exists between the Piedmontese, on the one hand, and the Neapolitan, on the other, than between an Englishman of Devonshire and a Scotchman. Not only is the difference recognizable in the field of politics and economics, but also, and much more distinctly, in the sphere of manners, customs, daily life and domestic economy. Hence, it is almost impossible to make a statement applicable to all Italy. What is true of Lombardy would be false if applied to Tuscany or to Sicily. It may even be said that what is true of the Florentines is not true of their neighbors, the Sienese or the Pisans. Mr. Villari has, therefore, found it needful to deal separately with the various parts of the country, and to avoid general statements as much as possible.

There is no doubt that a broad line of division may be drawn in the peninsula between the north and the south, the island of Sicily being regarded as a continuation of southern Italy. In the north manufactures flourish, and the people are active, progressive and prosperous. The south is almost exclusively agricultural; its inhabitants are backward, indolent, miserably poor. In the north a considerable advance has been made in political education, and the keenest interest is evinced in social and political questions; the south is apathetic and shows no aptitude for upright politics. The ignorance of the south is proverbial. The proportion of illiterates among the recruits in the Province of Naples was at a recent date 51.37 per cent., and in Sicily 55.04 per cent., while in Piedmont it was only 14.98 per cent. In criminal statistics, also, the south had a bad preëminence. In 1896 and 1897 the number of murders committed in Sicily per 100,000 inhabitants was 27.90, and in the Province of Naples 24.53; whereas in Lombardy it was only 2.92. The same disproportion is observed in other crimes.

It was to be expected that these differences would produce a certain antagonism between northerners and southerners. The former take no pains to hide their contempt for their less progressive compatriots; they accuse the south of being the seed plot of all political corruption and say that the inertness and poverty of its inhabitants render the increased prosperity of northern Italy of little avail. Heavy taxes are laid on the country which north and south have to pay alike, but which, according to the northerners, are only needed to pay for the idleness and dishonesty of the south. On the other hand, the southerners assert—and Mr. Villari concedes that it is with some show of reason—that, if the manufactures of Piedmont and Lombardy are heavily taxed the agriculture of the south is taxed still more heavily; that the south has never had a fair chance given to it; that the national Government has always lavished its favors on the north, and by means of protectionist tariffs and otherwise, has promoted industry and trade, while it has done nothing for the depressed agriculturists of the south; that, in fine, the south pays much more than its due share of taxation, although it is so much poorer. Much more money has been spent on railways, schools and public works in the north than in the south, where the need was much greater. Our author acknowledges that, if the intelligent and progressive north is hampered by the dead weight of the ignorant and backward south, the north, on its part, has done comparatively little for the improvement of the provinces belonging to the old kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

So much for the broad geographical divisions. It is also to be noted that communal particularism survives even in northern Italy, and especially in Tuscany. There, as we have intimated, local jealousies still exist between towns separated by only a few miles from each other. In Siena, for instance, the Florentine is looked upon almost as a foreigner; socially he is not well received and he is constantly reminded of the past wars and struggles between the two republics. The battle of Monteferti, in which the Sienese defeated the Florentines in A. D. 1260, and for a moment obtained the hegemony of Tuscany, is a favorite topic of conversation. On the other hand, the Florentines regard the Sienese with disdain, and, as a rule, take not the slightest interest in them or their affairs. Mr. Villari says that he has personally known scores of educated Florentines who had never been in Siena and knew practically nothing about it, although it is only forty miles from Florence. Other local rivalries are numerous in Tuscany, and, indeed, in all parts of central Italy. Pisa, Arezzo, Volterra, Montepulciano, San Gimigniano, are all remarkable for their *spirito di campanile*, or belfry spirit, as this feeling is called. All Tuscans except, of course, the Maremmani themselves, are agreed in despising the Maremma, the marshy lands between Pisa and Civita-Vecchia, and its inhabitants, whom they regard as miserable savages and inferior beings altogether. In a few Tuscan towns there are still narrower distinctions between the dwellers in one quarter and those in another. A notable example is the rivalry between the *contrade*, or town wards of Siena. In Cortona and other places there are factions, and the members of one will have no relations with those of the other. The causes of these local differences are, of course, chiefly historical. Similar municipal jealousies existed at one time in Lombardy, which, like Tuscany, used to be divided into many city republics, but better communications and the extension of trade and industry are gradually extinguishing the mediæval particularism.

A feature of Italian society which is often overlooked is the existence therein of two separate types of aristocracy—the feudal, or territorial, and the citizen, or burgher, aristocracy. The former survives in Piedmont, in the Agro Romano, in certain parts of Tuscany, all over the south, in Sicily and in Sardinia. The patriciate of citizen origin is found in the towns of Lombardy, Venetia and central Italy. In Piedmont even the landed aristocracy has lost its original feudal character and is assimilated with the patriciate of northern Italy rather than with the southern nobility. The Piedmontese nobles are, we are told, good landlords, and introduce improvements on their estates, but, considered as a class, they have lost all political significance. The Lombard nobility, which is of burgher origin, is, on the contrary, the most progressive section of the Italian upper classes, and the richest. It has taken the lead in the new industrial and commercial movement to which the Lombard towns owe their prosperity. Many of the Lombard nobles are men of wealth, having incomes of £10,000, £20,000 and sometimes even £40,000 or £50,000 a year. Unlike the Lombard nobles, who are still actively connected with silk factories, engineering works and banks, the upper classes in central Italy, although also descended from merchants, have entirely abandoned the pursuit of commerce.

The Tuscan nobles, for example, derive their income almost entirely from lands, and, although fairly shrewd, are narrow-minded and conservative. There are no very large fortunes in central Italy, a great many Marquises, Counts and Barons having to keep up their status on the narrowest means. It is conceded, however, that the Tuscan nobles are excellent landlords, living on their estates for a great part of the year. The feudal aristocrat of the south presents a type materially different from that of his peers in northern and central Italy. On his estates he continues to exercise rights and privileges of a purely feudal nature, although these are no longer sanctioned by the law. The southern nobles are described by Mr. Villari as ignorant, overbearing, incorrigibly lazy and corrupt. They are absentee landlords, living at Naples, Palermo or Rome for the greater part, if not the whole, of the year, and look upon their estates, which are left in the hands of extortionate bailiffs and middlemen, merely as sources of income. In politics their influence is wholly evil, and they do not hesitate to make use of the Mafia or the Camorra to maintain their position. Of course, our author would not deny that, even in this degenerate class, there may be found now and then men of high character and zeal for the public good. For instance, one of the most respectable and disinterested Premiers of modern Italy was a Sicilian landlord, the Marchese di Rudini.

There is one thing to be said in favor even of the feudal nobles of southern Italy and Sicily. Though they have a very exalted idea of their social position, they do not show it outwardly, but treat men of lower birth with politeness and even cordiality. Nowhere in Italy indeed is good society very exclusive. Mr. Villari testifies that a rich man may obtain access to the most select circles. It is true that one meets very few professional men in aristocratic drawing rooms, but this is attributed quite as much to their own abhorrence of anything that savors of frivolity as to exclusiveness on the part of the nobility. As a rule, an Italian aristocrat is so conscious of his superior rank that he feels he can entertain whom he likes without loss of dignity. In some Italian cities, nevertheless, there are separate clubs for the nobility and the bourgeoisie, each of which bars out the members of the other. Another characteristic of the upper classes in Italian society is the comparative absence of anti-Semitic feeling. Rich Jews are treated as equals by the noblest in the land. It is true that among some of the more old-fashioned people, especially among the Clericals, and in Venice, Jews are not received, but, as a rule, no distinction is made on account of race or religion. Many Jews have been ennobled, and are recognized as members of the *aristocrazia* and leaders of society.

In a chapter on "Social Life" attention is directed to the fact that in Italy social etiquette is in some respects laxer, in others more rigorous, than in England. When a hostess invites her friends to luncheon or dinner, she is not tortured by anxiety lest the number of men should fail to correspond exactly to that of the ladies. The latter do not get up from the table before the men, but the whole party arises immediately after dinner and adjourns to the drawing room, where nearly every one of both sexes smokes. At parties the servants hand round cigarettes with refreshments to the ladies and gentlemen alike. At a ball a man is not obliged to stick to his partner through a whole dance; one or two turns are enough, after which he may favor some other dancer without causing offence to the first. On the other hand, certain rules are observed with the greatest strictness. In the first place, you are the slave of the visiting card. If a gentleman be casually introduced to a married woman, even though he do not exchange two words with her, he must leave his card for her and for her husband within forty-eight hours. Even a casual introduction to a man is supposed to require an exchange of pasteboards, but this rule is not so rigorously enforced. If you fail to do your duty in the card line you are regarded as an ill-mannered boor, or the omission is taken as an equivalent to the expression of a desire not to know the person you have met. At New Year's you are obliged to leave cards for all your friends and acquaintances. Another rule which must be carefully observed is not to be seen too frequently in the company of a young girl. If you speak to her or dance with her often, there will probably be rumors that you are engaged to her.

The subjects of conversation are also strictly limited, and although you may talk to a married woman in a far freer manner than would be considered seemly in England, you cannot be too careful as to what you may say to an unmarried girl in Italy, and you may shock her by saying things to which an American girl would not object. We are told that, when Italian nobles or patricians go to the country, both the men and the ladies wear their shabbiest clothes and no one attempts to be smart. In the country, for instance, you may find a lady whom you had last seen in the town attired in elaborate Paris gowns now wearing an old, worn-out gown and slippers down at heel, with her hair anyhow, everything about her pointing to an absolute disregard for appearances. There is far less entertaining during the *villeggiatura* than is the case in England. In the north of Italy, indeed, a few of the richer people entertain regular house parties on the English plan. But as a rule only one or two guests are asked to stay, or standing invitations are given to friends should they happen to be in the neighborhood. A favorite way of passing the summer is to go to the seaside or to some inland watering place. Even people who have landed property like to go to the *bagni* for a month or two if they can afford it. There is a social convention among Italians that acquaintances made at seaside or other watering places—*conoscenzi di bagni*—need not be continued in town. People who at the baths of Lucca have seen each other every day, and have been, apparently, on the most intimate terms, will not even bow when they meet in the streets of Rome, Florence or Milan.

Looked for Natural Gas With a Match.

From the Louisville Courier-Journal.

GWINOSVILLE, Ky., Sept. 13.—Near Frenchburg some teamsters were spending the night near an abandoned gas well. During the night they were awakened by a peculiar bubbling sound coming from the well. They went to the well and lighted a match for the purpose of making an investigation, when the gas which had been escaping became ignited and shot upward several feet, scorching the beards and eyebrows of the men and slightly burning their faces. The escape of the gas continues.